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# WOMEN'S LAND ARMY



EXTENSION FARM LABOR PROGRAM  
1943 - 1944 - 1945

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
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## INTRODUCTION

The Women's Land Army of World War II was a movement rather than an organization. It was one part of the nation-wide Emergency Farm Labor Program authorized by Congress, directed in each state by the Agricultural Extension Service of the land grant colleges.

North, South, East and West, women made a definite contribution to wartime food production, more than 2,000,000 placements of women in farm jobs being made in 1943, 1944 and 1945, mostly for seasonal work.

Early in 1943, most states appointed WLA supervisors, full-time or part-time, to work with county agricultural agents and farm labor assistants on recruitment of women, when and where needed, to help with planting, cultivating and harvesting of wartime crops.

The Women's Land Army Division of the Federal Extension office assisted the State WLA supervisors throughout the war period by conferences, by letters and by a national information program -- radio, magazine and news stories -- which stimulated women in all parts of the country to "join up" for farm work.

#### ...Women Came From Farms, Cities, and Towns

The WLA included women from farms, cities and towns -- farm women who worked longer hours than usual, taking the place of sons or hired men gone to war or industry -- women from offices, factories and stores -- women whose husbands were overseas -- housewives, college girls and teachers. They were women of all ages. Some spent the entire summer on the farm, others a few days, weekends or a vacation period. Some went to live with the farm family; others lived in camps, but most of the women who did farm work went out from their own homes during peak seasons to help on nearby farms.

#### ...Did All Kinds of Farm Work

Women did almost every type of farm work, offering their services in many cases to farmers skeptical of their ability to do the job. Thousands of them had never been on a farm before. But they were willing to learn, and eager to help in the war emergency, and proved to be a real factor in America's record food production.

For women who volunteered for farm work, the experience was valuable. They earned prevailing wages, acquired new skills, and learned something about how farm people live. Better understanding between town and country folks is one of the important by-products of the Woman's Land Army program.



*Women of all ages are part of the WLA...like Genevieve Nichols, a student, who lived on a Maine farm during summers of the war years.*

A 4x6 grid of 24 small circles, arranged in four rows and six columns. The circles are evenly spaced and have a uniform size.

1960-1961 (1960-1961) (1960-1961)

## FARM WOMEN

Nearly every farm woman had extra duties during the war. Wives, daughters, sisters of farmers did a magnificent job, helping with haying, milking, feeding livestock -- this usually in addition to the housework. Farm women have always had full work days but the shortage of both field and household hired workers meant even longer days for many of them in the war years.

Farm women throughout the country met the emergency with customary energy. When they were needed in the fields they helped. At a time when thousands of their sons were fighting for Uncle Sam this was to be expected of them. These new problems of farm women naturally affected Extension's home demonstration program. And so developing in cooperation with the WLA program in many states, an educational program of homemaking shortcuts was directed not only to home demonstration club members but to all farm women who could be reached.

### ...Home Demonstration Workers Had Expanding Field

Home demonstration workers had an expanding teaching field as they encouraged more homemakers to apply principles of work simplification, which involved questioning each job somewhat as follows: Is this job necessary? Where, when and by whom should it be done? What is the best way to do it?

In home demonstration programs emphasis was placed on simplification, i.e., rearranging kitchens to save steps and time, preparing one dish meals, letting some garments go unironed, and perhaps closing off part of the house to save heat and cleaning.

When the labor situation was especially acute, farm women showed that they could be counted on in the fields. Members of a home demonstration club in Mississippi used their meeting days for group field work on farms in the community. Farm women usually worked on their own farms, helping to fill vacancies left by their menfolks and hired hands. But many also helped their neighbors after their home tasks were finished, like the family in South Dakota, who worked together as a crew and helped neighbors at threshing time.

A New Hampshire farm daughter hired out to another farm family after her father finally succeeded in getting a hired man.

A Georgia woman added to her housework and canning chores the job of milking, caring for the chickens, and working in a two-acre vegetable garden, which she plowed herself. She also averaged 250 pounds of cotton a day in cotton picking time.



*A Midwestern farm woman who drove a tractor from 4 to 8 a.m. during corn planting time.*



In an effort to get information regarding additional responsibilities which farm women are carrying in wartime, Mrs. Harriett Martinson, WLA Supervisor in South Dakota, developed a questionnaire which was sent to a number of South Dakota farm women. Returning the questionnaire, one farm woman sent the following letter:

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August 6, 1944...."We're busy harvesting now, and are just through cutting and shocking. I think that we farm women, putting in 14 and 15 hours daily, are entitled to a little extra money too...staying at home doing jobs of all kinds around the farm, outside and inside. I have eight children at home...three away, eleven in all. Three small girls, twins 5 and the other one 6. Three heads to comb, dresses, slips, bloomers, and all kinds of clothing to sew, even now in wartime I make their coats. Five boys, ages 16, 14, 13, 10 and 8. I cut all the boys' hair, also my husband's...and, part of the time I cut his whiskers, saves a trip to town and money.

"Washing clothes, mending and ironing is a weekly job. I make shirts, overalls, and jackets for the two small boys. Cooking large meals, washing a mess of dishes as big as a thresher crew, three times a day, all the bread baking, cookies, pies and cakes I do...very seldom we buy ready baked foods, as it's rather expensive.

"I often help with separating the milk, and wash the dairy utensils, such as milk pails, cream cans, separator. Raise a large garden, can close to 100 quarts of each variety of vegetables, such as swiss chard, string beans, tomatoes (green and ripe) and always 100 quarts of corn. I use field corn if we don't have the sweet corn, using a teaspoon of sugar to each quart, and we like it just as well. We like dill pickles, and also sauerkraut. We put up close to 50 gallons of each. Last winter the oldest boys and I took care of our meat, cut up the pieces, salted the pork, and canned 65 quarts of beef, made head cheese, and fried down the lard. We churn our own butter, another job for me.

"Last year, while my husband and oldest boy were out with the threshing crew, I helped morning and night with milking, picking corn for pigs, etc., for about two months. I am planning to do it again this year if I am needed.

"I also have to keep up our record book. I keep track of all grocery bills, egg and cream stubs and all important bills and papers, another farm problem. And, put them in our book. The poultry problems are mine. I clean, repair the brooder house, disinfect it, fix windows and all, dig post holes and fix the wire on the poultry feeding pens and make chicken-coops. I have 100 young chickens this year and 65 young turkeys.

"I am teaching my boys to help with housework, when they are not busy outside, they dislike housework. And, they are awkward about it, also need quite a lot of encouragement. But, it lifts a lot. Likewise my 3 little girls, I am training to wipe granite ware, forks, knives, spoons and the like...also to sweep floors. It takes lots of patience.

"If it wasn't for all this home-front work, to keep the men and boys in the fields, and other working places, I too could apply for an outside defense job and earn big money."



## TOWN WOMEN

Some hurdles had to be overcome regarding the use of town women as a farm labor source during the war.

### ...Farmers Skeptical at First

Farmers were reluctant to use "green labor" of any kind. Many had a decided prejudice against hiring town women. True, many town people had an unrealistic view of farm work, so sensible recruiting methods were called for, emphasizing the fact that farm work is strenuous outdoor work requiring durable clothing and 3 meals a day of energy giving food. There was wide variation in the development of programs for women as farm hands, depending upon local needs and the type of farm work to be done.

New England farmers, suffering from competition in industries for labor, used many college girls. Smith College, for instance, developed a vacation plan of "work and study," for their college students during summers of the war years. In 1944, approximately 175 Smith College students worked all summer on New England farms.

With many farmers, women were a "last resort" measure. In Virginia for instance, peach growers were hard to convince that camps of city women would help them get 1944 bumper crops of fruit picked and packed. Their decision to use women came only after it was evident that no other labor would be available. But once the women were recruited and placed, such commendations as these were heard from the growers. "They were quick to learn." "They were conscientious and had dogged perseverance." They helped us get the job done."

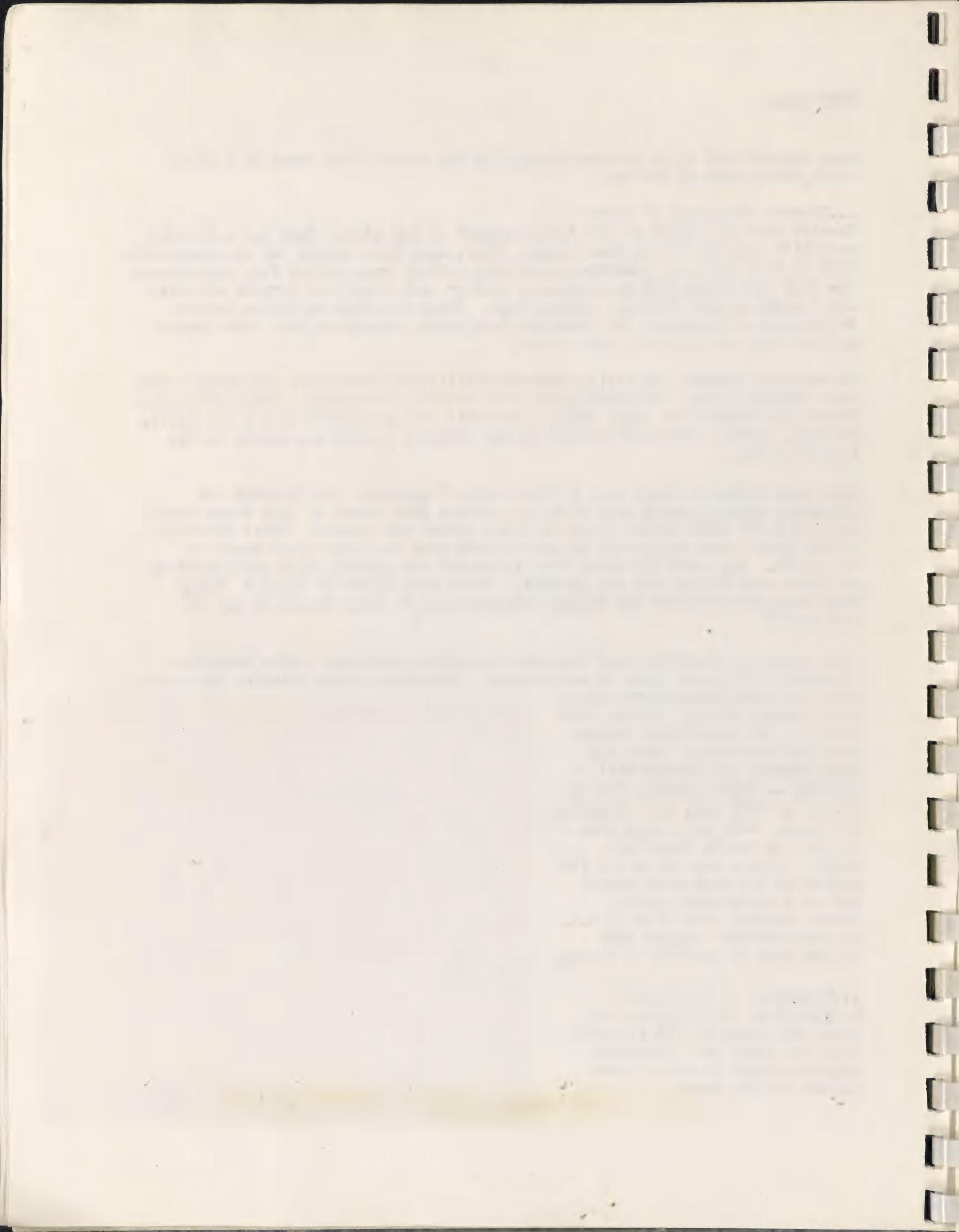
Town women who did farm work included homemakers, college girls, teachers, business girls, and wives of servicemen. Homemakers often answered the local call for peak-season harvesting. In an Oregon county in 1944, for example, 500 homemakers helped save the bean crop. Each day they boarded the Housewives' Special -- buses leaving for the fields at 8:30 a.m. and returning at 3 p.m. This gave them time to get the family breakfast before leaving and to market for supper in the late afternoons. And in a California county, women, working from 7 to 11 p.m. as peachcutters, helped save 20,000 tons of peaches by drying.

### ...Realistic View Necessary

A great deal of publicity, an important phase of WLA recruiting, was based on information regarding what to expect when placed in farm work.



*WLA platoon leaders and two of their top ranking bean pickers on a farm in Oregon.*



From the national level State supervisors of WLA programs had the assistance of a build-up in national magazines and on national radio networks. Supervisors embarked upon a publicity program in many of their own states that took them to most of the radio stations, the city newspaper offices, the headquarters of women's organizations, the State Chamber of Commerce, department store managers in the cities, etc. They received excellent cooperation from advertisers -- both in newspapers and store display windows.

For the most part, women farm workers did seasonal work, filling a need for which they were well fitted, which was for picking and packing of fruit and vegetables at the height of the season. But some women did serve as year-round hired hands. Their numbers were small in comparison to seasonal workers, but 11,000 of them were placed for year-round work in 1944. Many were wives of men working on the same farm. Others were like a girl with four brothers in the armed services who did farm work as her war job. One woman left a \$65 a week position to "render a greater patriotic service in farm work." Another woman who hoped to farm with her sailor husband after the war learned some phases of farm work during the war.

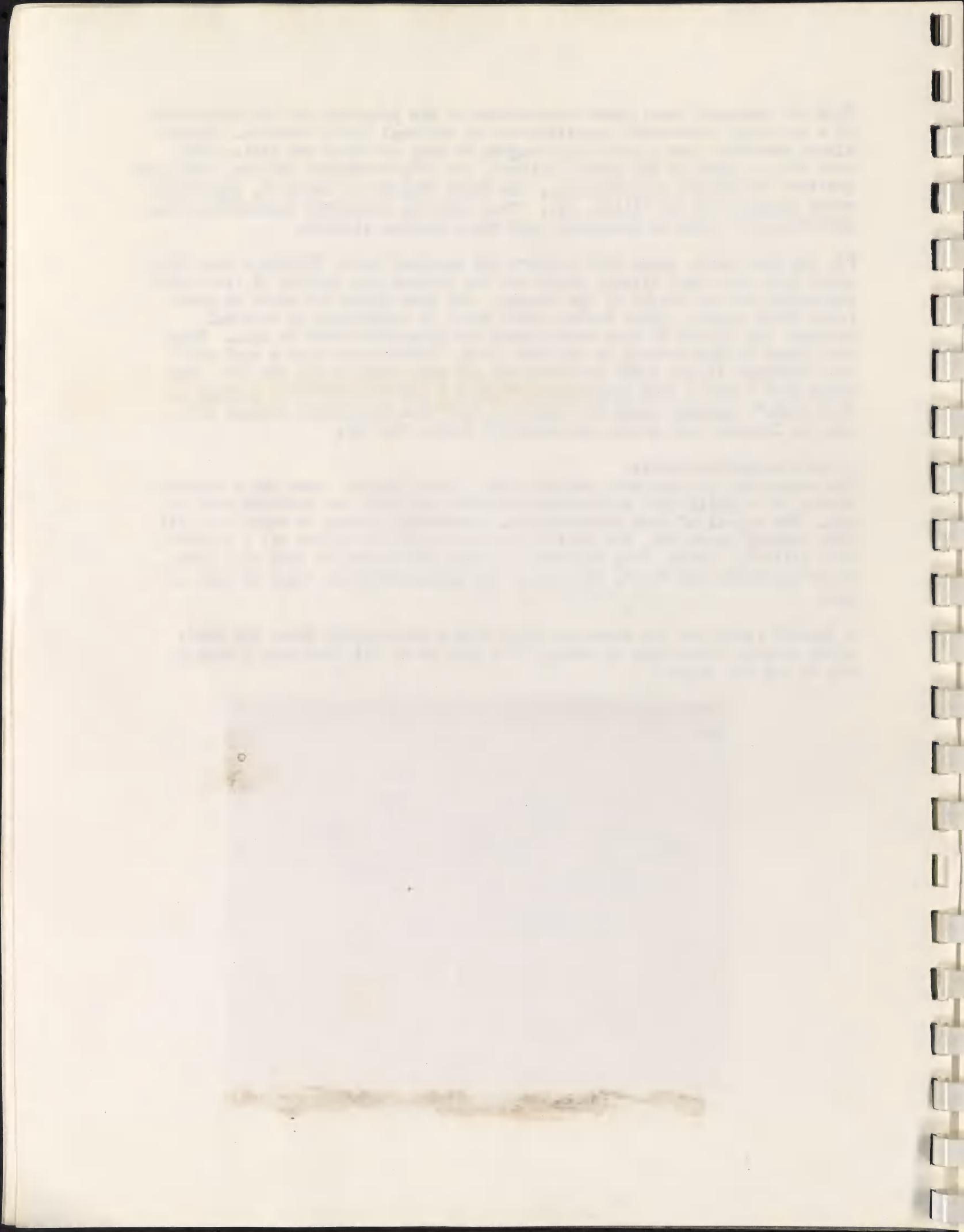
#### ...Patriotism Big Motive

The recruiting job was made easier at all times because women had a driving desire to do their part while their husbands and sons and brothers were at war. The appeal of food production was especially strong to women who felt that feeding ourselves, the boys at the front and our allies was a constructive activity. Food, they believed and came to understand even more after their experience on farms, was one of the cornerstones of peace as well as war.

A typical remark of the women was this from a 60-year-old woman who said, after picking three tons of beans, "I'm glad to do it! You see, I have a son in the Air Corps."



*Taking care of the poultry flocks was one of the jobs*



Inquiries were sent to some farmers regarding their experience with women who had been placed on their farms by County Extension Farm Labor Offices. The following letter was received from a Midwestern farmer. He was farming 1,200 acres, and had asked for 4 women to help out.

"September 29, 1944

Dear Sir:

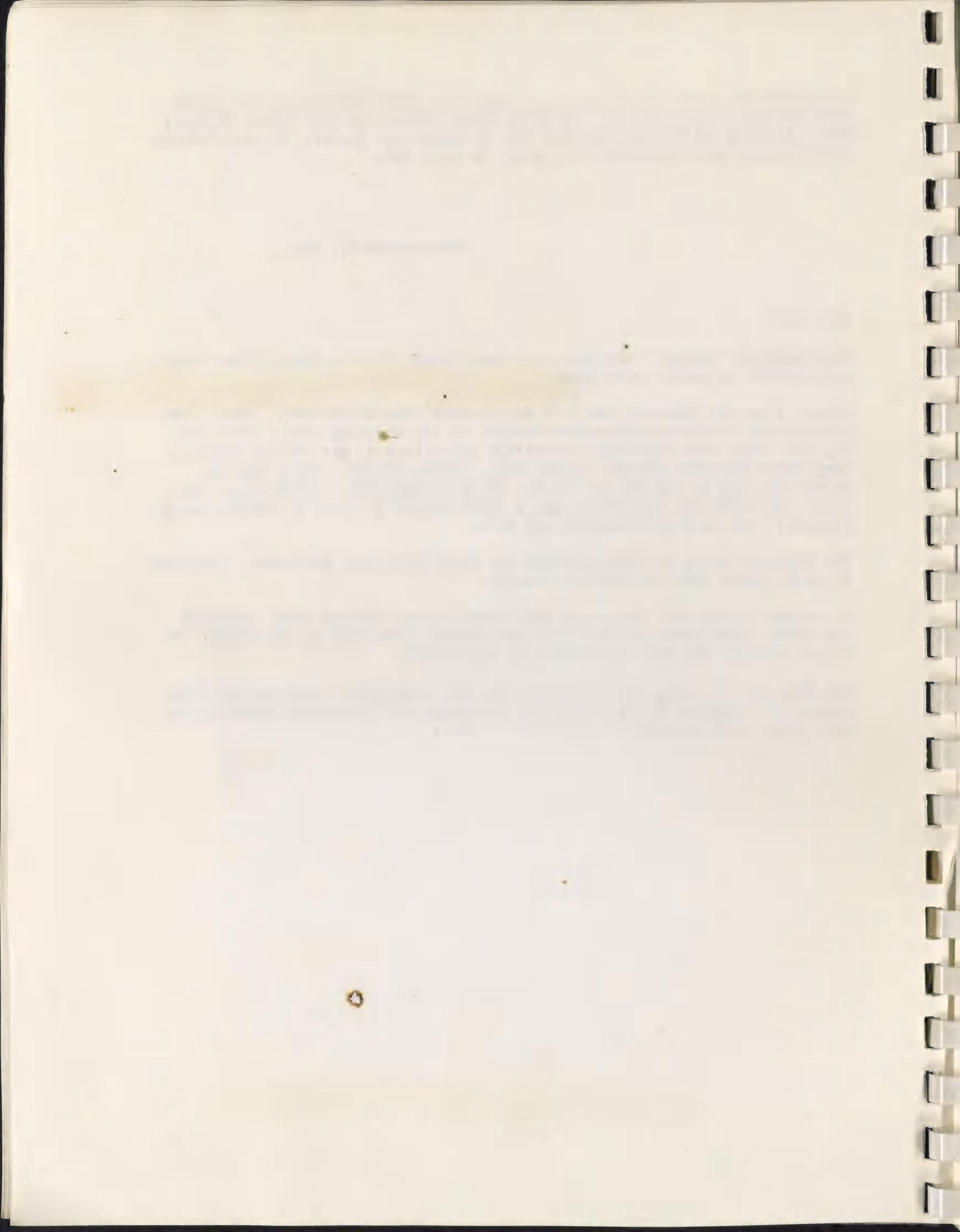
Received your inquiry today about my experience with the Women's Land Army, and decided to answer right away.

First, I was in an awful jam or I would never have tried them. Then I saw the article in the newspaper and decided to try anything once. Now I will say that they were eminently successful and helped me get the job done.... they drove tractors for me on side rake, pick-up baler, rotary hoe and trucks to pick up hay in the field. One girl had never driven a car, but before she left she had driven all 4 tractors and 3 trucks of various manufacture. One girl got homesick and left.

The biggest factor to their success was their patriotic attitude. They came to help rather than make a lot of money.

Of course, there were many days when there was no tractor work, and they cut weeds, hoed weeds, helped with the garden, lawn, and in the house. No matter how hot the day, there were no complaints.

The boys in the armed forces should know the remarkable work done by these women and farmer's wives. Certainly thousands and thousands have done far more than could normally be expected of them."



## DAY-HAULS, LIVE-INS, CAMPS

By far the greatest number of women farm workers lived at home and went to the fields in day-hauls. Day-haul women most frequently worked in seasonal crops, planting or cultivating but more often harvesting fruits and vegetables. Their efforts in many cases saved food that otherwise would have been wasted.

Women campers, most of them college girls, teachers, and business women, had perhaps the most interesting experiences as WLA enrollees because recreation as well as work was part of the program. For the farmer, camps provided a valuable labor source because he could depend on campers as he could not always depend on local labor which he might have used prior to the war. When camp managers contracted to have 20 women ready to pick peaches on a certain day the farmer was practically certain of this number. The problem of camp management was complicated, however, by the fact that the farmer could not always vouch for the weather or crop conditions ahead of time and was not always able to use every camper every day. Well-organized camps of course were prepared for this situation.

Most women who lived in camps went for one or two weeks although sometimes for an entire summer. Many college students formed groups that lived as one household in the farming area where they worked.

Camps for women workers were operated in 12 states in 1945. In 1944, New York State's WLA camps included about 3,000 New York City women and girls on their vacation time. Camp Allegan in Michigan housed a maximum of 36 women and girls during a two-week period, the campers picking more than 14 tons of beans, 83 bushels of plums, 323 crates of carrots. In addition they picked peaches for 360 hours.

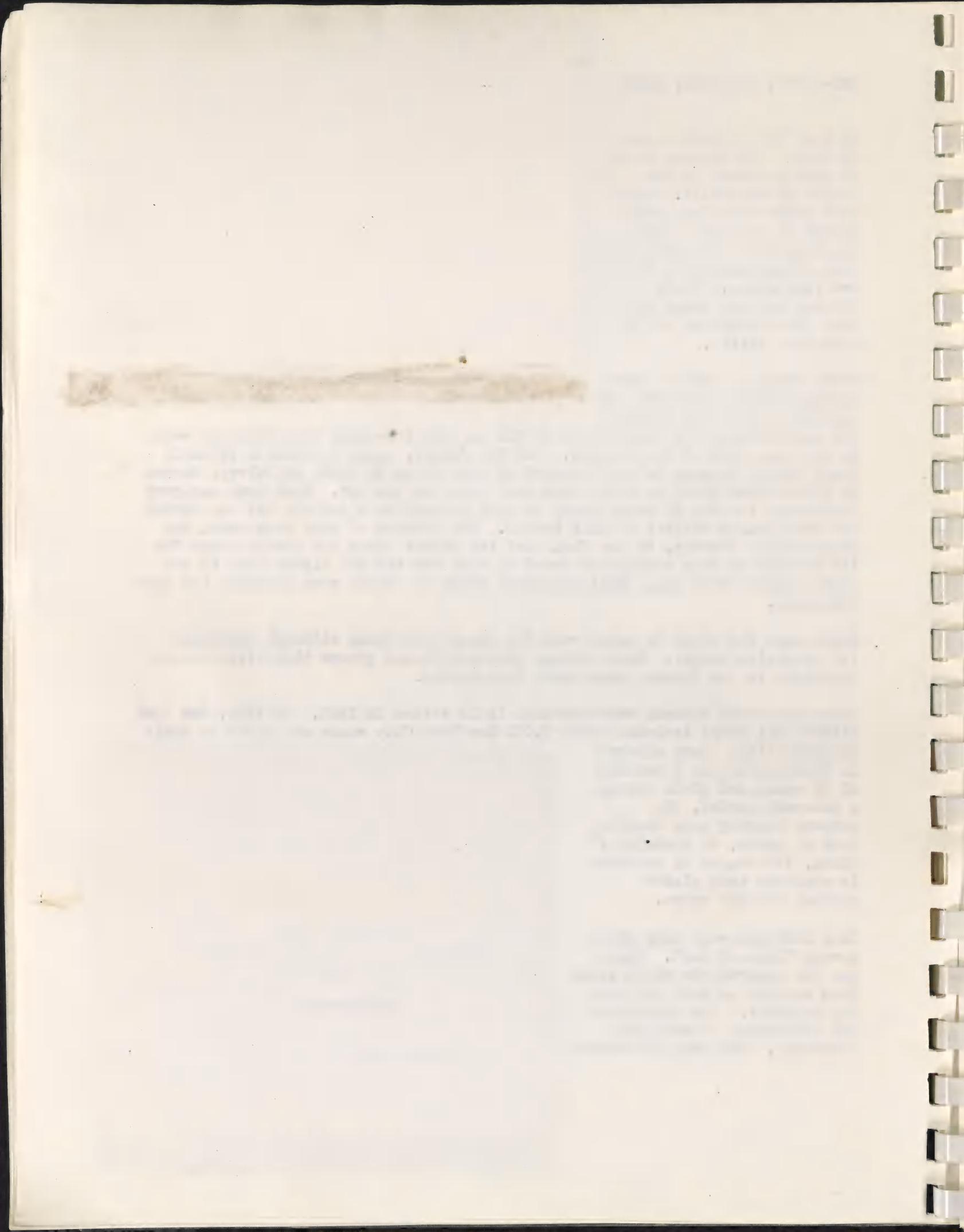
Camp life was what many girls termed "lots of fun". There was the camaraderie which arose from working as well as playing together. The experience was broadening to everyone concerned. Not only did these



*Girls who went to work as day hauls were sometimes hauled to the fields in trucks like this one.*



*This farmer's daughter was a big help to her father on the farm*



urban women learn more about rural living but they met city women of varying backgrounds and ages. For many women, farm labor camps provided a kind of vacation during which they could contribute to the war effort.

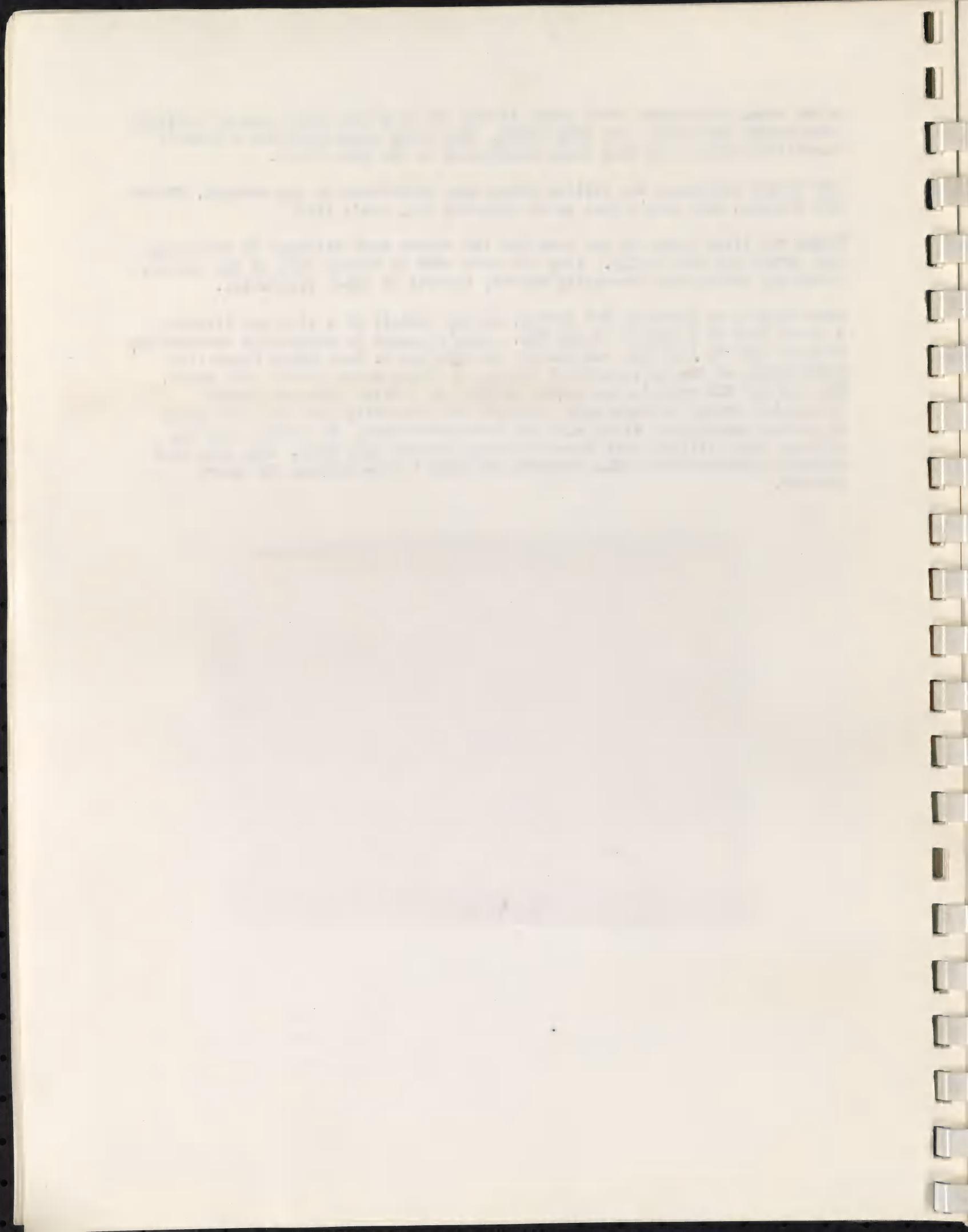
One worker expressed her feeling about camp experience by the comment, "We're all friends, and that's what we're fighting for, isn't it?"

Women who lived right on the farm for the summer were valuable in relieving the farmer and his family. They did such work as taking care of the garden, planting, hoeing and harvesting onions, carrots or other vegetables.

Jean Ritchie of Trenton, New Jersey, is one example of a girl who lived on a dairy farm as a member of the WLA. Jean's record is especially outstanding because late in 1945 she was awarded the Charles E. Hood Dairy Foundation Scholarship at the University of Maine, the first woman to win this award. She did her WLA work in the summer of 1942 on a Maine farm and became interested enough in farm work to enter the University that fall and major in animal husbandry. Along with her scholastic work, she worked with the college herd, milking test cows and doing general barn work. She also gave valuable instruction to WLA trainees who came to the college for short periods.



Camps often had good swimming facilities, and a cold dip was always a popular form of recreation.



## TRAINING

Training for farm work has been for the most part a job for farmers. "On-the-job" training was often the most satisfactory since many farmers would prefer to show workers how they want things done. For seasonal day-haul jobs this was especially true. The farmer or his foreman or other assistant usually gave instructions before a group went to work at a planting, cultivating or harvesting job.

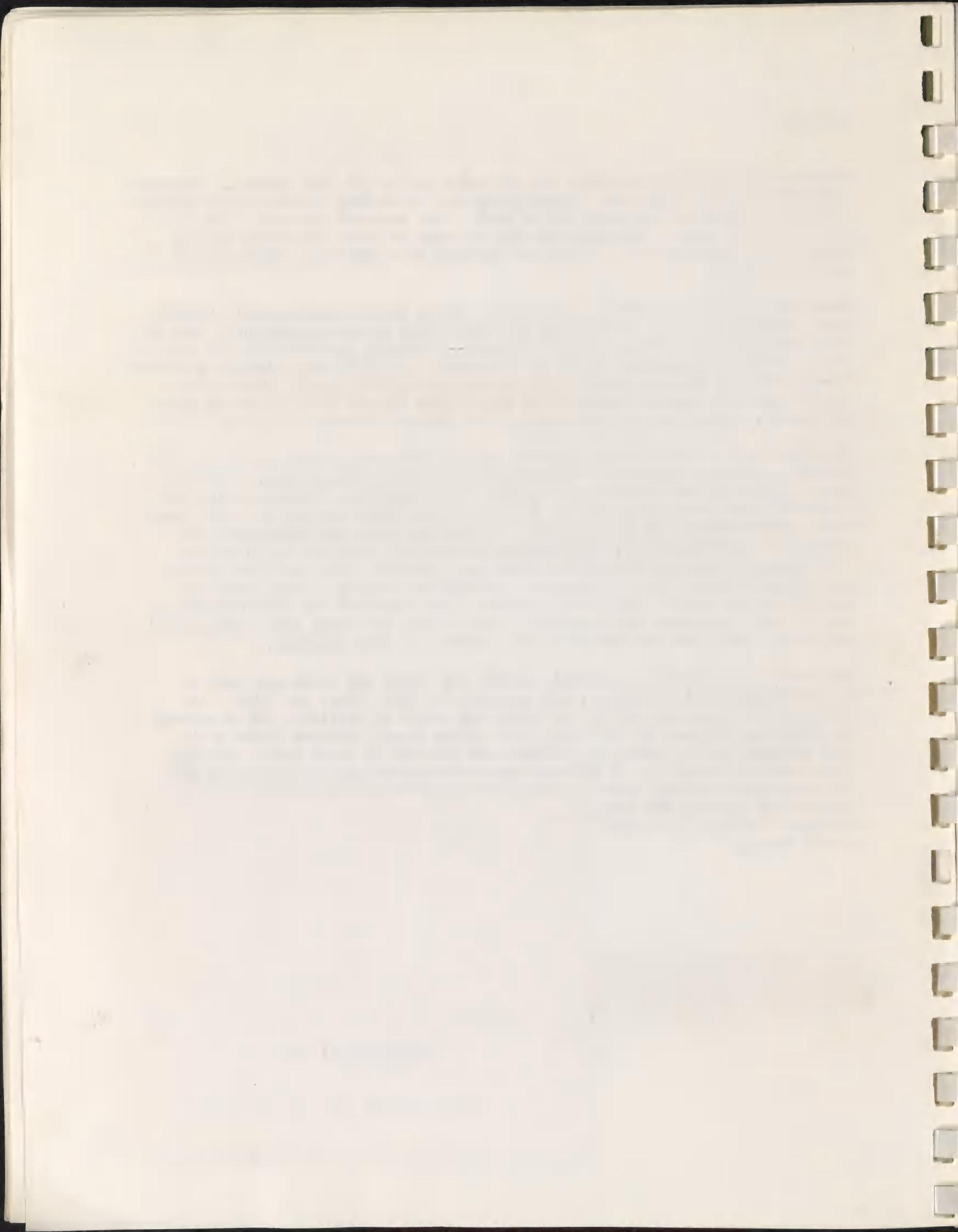
Women who went to live on farms, however, often needed some special orientation. Especially was this helpful for women with no farm experience. And so some few states gave concentrated courses — training periods of a few days or a few weeks for special kinds of farm work. In 1945, South Dakota sponsored one-day tractor training schools in 10 counties of the state. These were held in April to prepare prospective women farm workers for the coming growing season. More than 300 women and girls learned to drive tractors.

Michigan held a 5-day training period in 1944 for work leaders and camp supervisors. In cooperation with the Emergency Farm Labor Program and the State Board of Control for Vocational Education, Michigan State College also held a special four weeks short course in the fall of 1944 designed to train year-round farm workers. It was open to both nonfarm women and farm women not needed on their own farms. Instruction plans, for instance, included such activities as feeding and care of livestock, general dairy practice in the barn and milkhouse, poultry culling, grading and packing of eggs, work in the fields, harnessing and driving horses, and operation and care of electric motors, feed grinders, and tractors. In addition to actual farm work, health and safety practices and orientation to farm life were stressed.

New York's two-week intensive WLA courses for women and girls were set up at Farmingdale on Long Island, and operated in 1943, 1944, and 1945. The Farmingdale course was set up for women who would be available for placement on individual farms. In 1945 the first course began February 5 and girls were expected to be ready for placement at the end of their two or possibly three weeks of training. Placement was also carried out in connection with the Farmingdale course since orders from upstate New York placement offices were sent to the "school."

*Some states gave concentrated training courses like the one illustrated here*





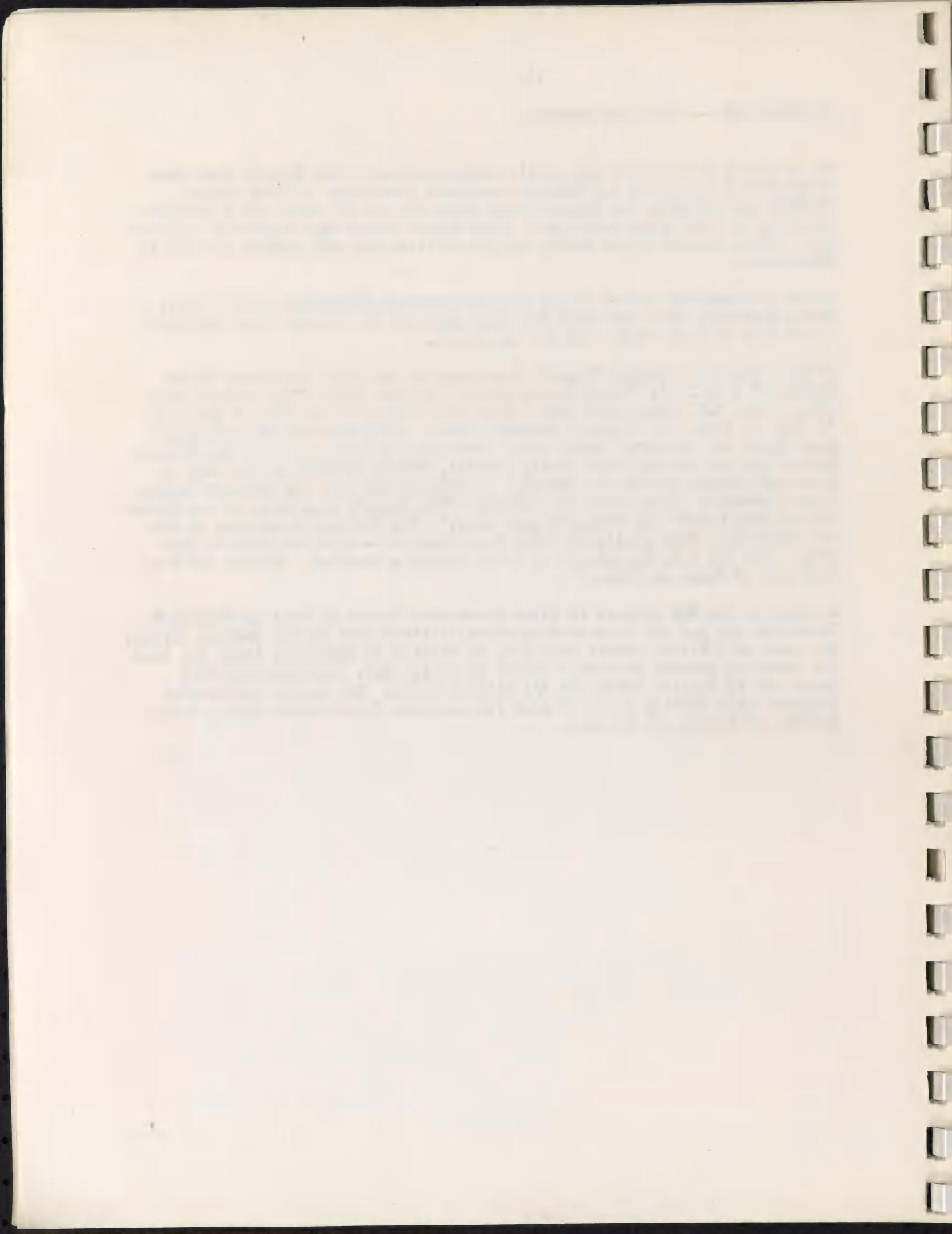
## PUBLICATIONS -- STATE AND FEDERAL

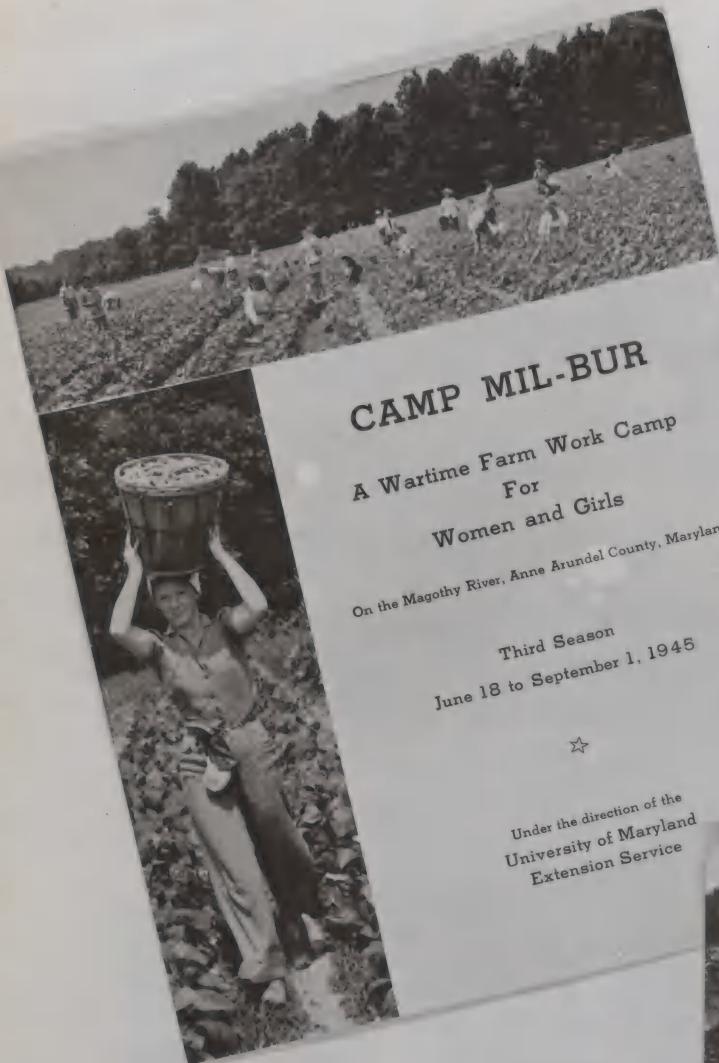
As an aid to recruitment and public understanding of the Women's Land Army program both the state and Federal emergency farm labor offices issued folders and posters, for distribution where the use of women was a feasible solution to farm labor shortages. Some states issued WLA materials of their own. Other states relied wholly on the publications and posters printed in Washington.

State publications varied to fit the agricultural situation in the state. Women sometimes were recruited for only one crop in a state, were wanted as "live-ins" in some states and not in others.

Federal folders included "Women's Land Army of the U.S. Crop Corps Needs Workers," July 1943; "Women Farm Workers," October 1943; "The Women's Land Army of the U.S. Crop Corps 1944," May 1944; "Pitch in and Help," May 1944; "A Call to Farms for Women of America," March 1945; and "The Women's Land Army Works for Victory," April 1945. Through the cooperation of the Federal WLA office and the National Safety Council, "Women Workers on the Farm -- Practical Safety Hints" was issued. In cooperation with the General Federation of Women's Clubs there were printed "The Women's Land Army of the United States Crop Corps" and "Women's Land Army." The National Committee on Boys and Girls Club Work published "Help Your Country -- Join the Women's Land Army," and the U.S. Department of Labor issued a pamphlet, "Guides for War-time Use of Women on Farms."

A study of the WLA program in eight Midwestern states in 1944 by Frances W. Valentine was put out in mimeographed-multilithed form by the Federal office. And some multilithed sheets entitled, "A Message to Employers About the Need for Vacation Harvest Workers," issued in early 1945, explained the 1945 needs for 1½ million youth and ¾ million women. The latter publication included maps showing areas of need for seasonal farm workers during July, August, September and October.





**CAMP MIL-BUR**  
A Wartime Farm Work Camp  
For  
Women and Girls

On the Magothy River, Anne Arundel County, Maryland

Third Season  
June 18 to September 1, 1945

Under the direction of the  
University of Maryland  
Extension Service

Typical State WLA  
Recruiting Leaflets

EXTENSION FOLIO #11 MAY 1944

**20,000 WOMEN  
Needed on  
MICHIGAN FARMS**

Emergency, seasonal and year-round workers are needed on Michigan farms. By harvesting crops and caring for poultry and livestock, war needs for food and labor are served.

Women can lend a hand by serving in the WOMEN'S LAND ARMY of the United States Crop Corps.

MICHIGAN STATE COLLEGE  
EXTENSION SERVICE  
SHERRILL FARM LABOR PROGRAM  
EAST LANSING

Take  
a  
"Fruit Furlough"



By Joining the  
*Women's Land Army*  
OF VIRGINIA



Maine Extension Circular 199 April, 1944

THE  
WEFS  
OF  
MAINE



*Here's Your Girl ...*

**Mr. and Mrs.  
FARMER**

\* 1944 FOOD PRODUCTION PROGRAM SERIES  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
Agricultural Extension Service  
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

WLA



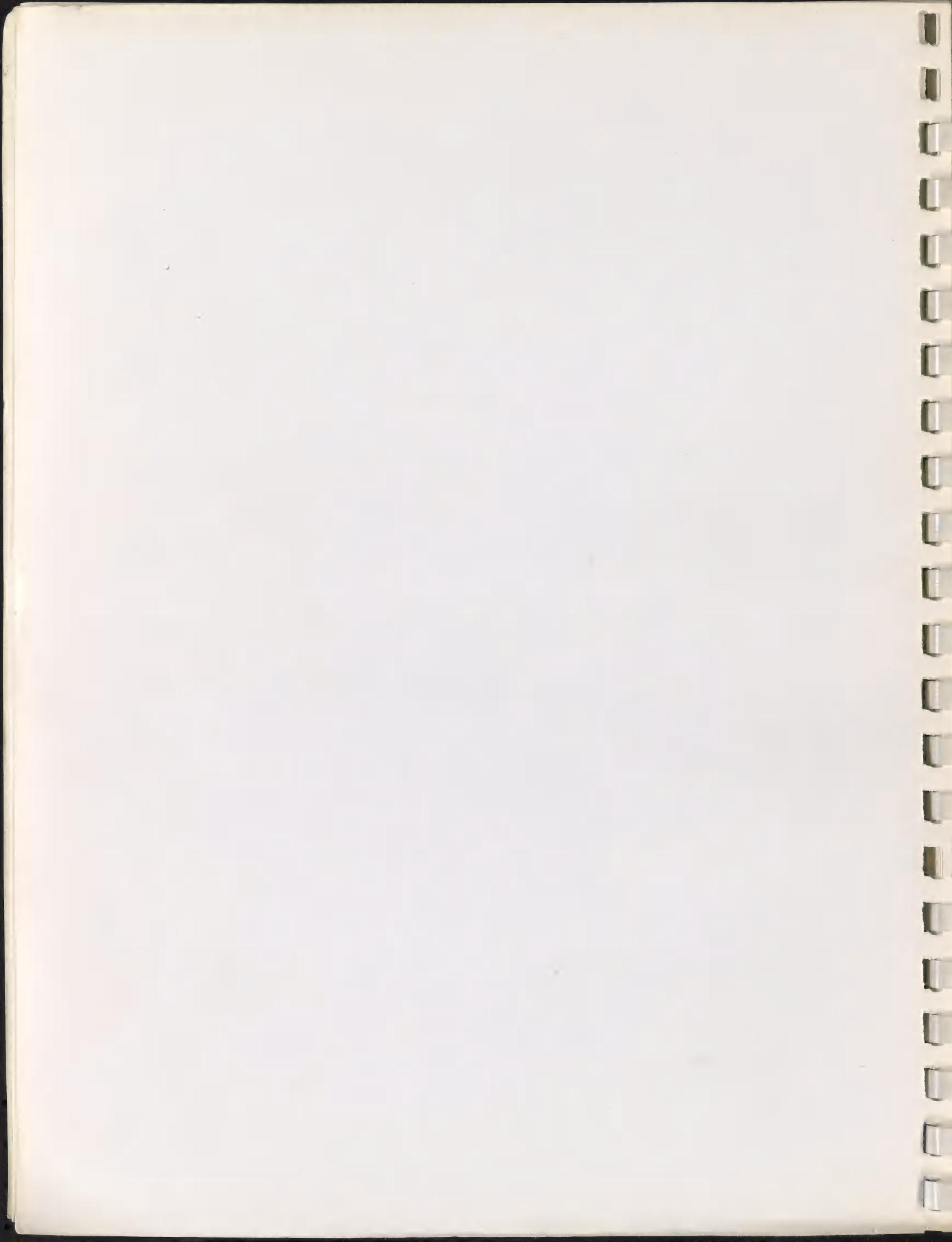
Join the Women's Land Army  
of the U. S. Crop Corps

**Y**OU can help to keep up the pace of food production to supply fighters and civilians.

Women 18 years of age and over, who are physically fit for farm work, are eligible to become members of the Women's Land Army for year-round or part-time work.

More than four million emergency workers, many of them women, will be needed to help produce the nation's food supply.

FARM WORK IS WAR WORK





Pitch in and  
Help!



The WOMEN'S LAND ARMY  
calls 800,000 women  
to the farm in 1944

EXTENSION SERVICE  
War Food Administration  
U.S. Department of Agriculture

WLA C

AWI-101 - MAY 1944



15th WAR FOOD CROP SAVED--  
with help of the Women's Land Army\*  
NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, AND WEST--  
women of all ages answered our country's  
call for help in food production  
WOMEN FROM FARMS, TOWNS, AND CITIES HELPED--  
to plant, cultivate, and harvest food vital  
to war victory and peacetime reconstruction  
\*The Women's Land Army is a part of the Farm Labor  
Program of the Extension Service of the War Food  
Administration and the State Agricultural Colleges.

### THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY

OF THE  
U.S. CROP CORPS  
1944



WAR FOOD ADMINISTRATION - U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
AWI-102 Extension Service May 1944



**A Call to Farms**  
FOR WOMEN OF AMERICA



A study of eight Midwest States in 1944 made by Frances W. Valentine  
for the Women's Land Army Division of the Farm Labor Program,  
Extension Service of the United States Department of Agriculture



## WOMEN'S LAND ARMY



GENERAL FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S CLUBS — 1944-1947  
Mrs. LaFell Dickinson, President  
1734 N Street, N. W., Washington 6, D. C.

## THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES CROP CORPS



MEMBER OF THE LAND ARMY



Programs of the General Federation of Women's Clubs—1941-1944  
MRS. JOHN L. WHITEHURST, PRESIDENT  
1734 N Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

### Leaflets Prepared by Agencies Cooperating with the Women's Land Army Program

**HELP  
YOUR  
COUNTRY**

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
FRANCES PERKINS, Secretary  
WOMEN'S BUREAU  
MARY ANDERSON, Director

SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES IN THE  
EMPLOYMENT OF NONFARM WOMEN  
ON FARMS IN THE NORTHEASTERN  
STATES, 1943

By  
FRANCES W. VALENTINE

BULLETIN OF THE WOMEN'S BUREAU, NO. 199

UNITED STATES  
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON : 1944

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office  
Washington 25, D. C. Price 10 cents

## WOMEN WORKERS ON THE FARM

### Practical Safety Hints

**WOMEN WORKERS ON THE FARM:** You will find a farm job different from indoor work. A farm job calls for clothes that protect from sunburn, with shoes that prevent bruises . . . lots of sleep and plenty of food to give energy for strenuous outdoor work . . . learning how best to handle yourself and farm tools and machinery the right way.

The right way to do any farm job is the safe way . . . and the safe way prevents accidents and keeps you on the job.





## COOPERATION OF ORGANIZATIONS AND PRESS

Women's organizations, educational and civic, and the publication field -- national, state and local -- lent hearty support to the Women's Land Army program throughout the war. Women's organizations cooperated with the program from the first. The press was cooperative as it was with other patriotic movements and because this new field of work for women had great "reader appeal."

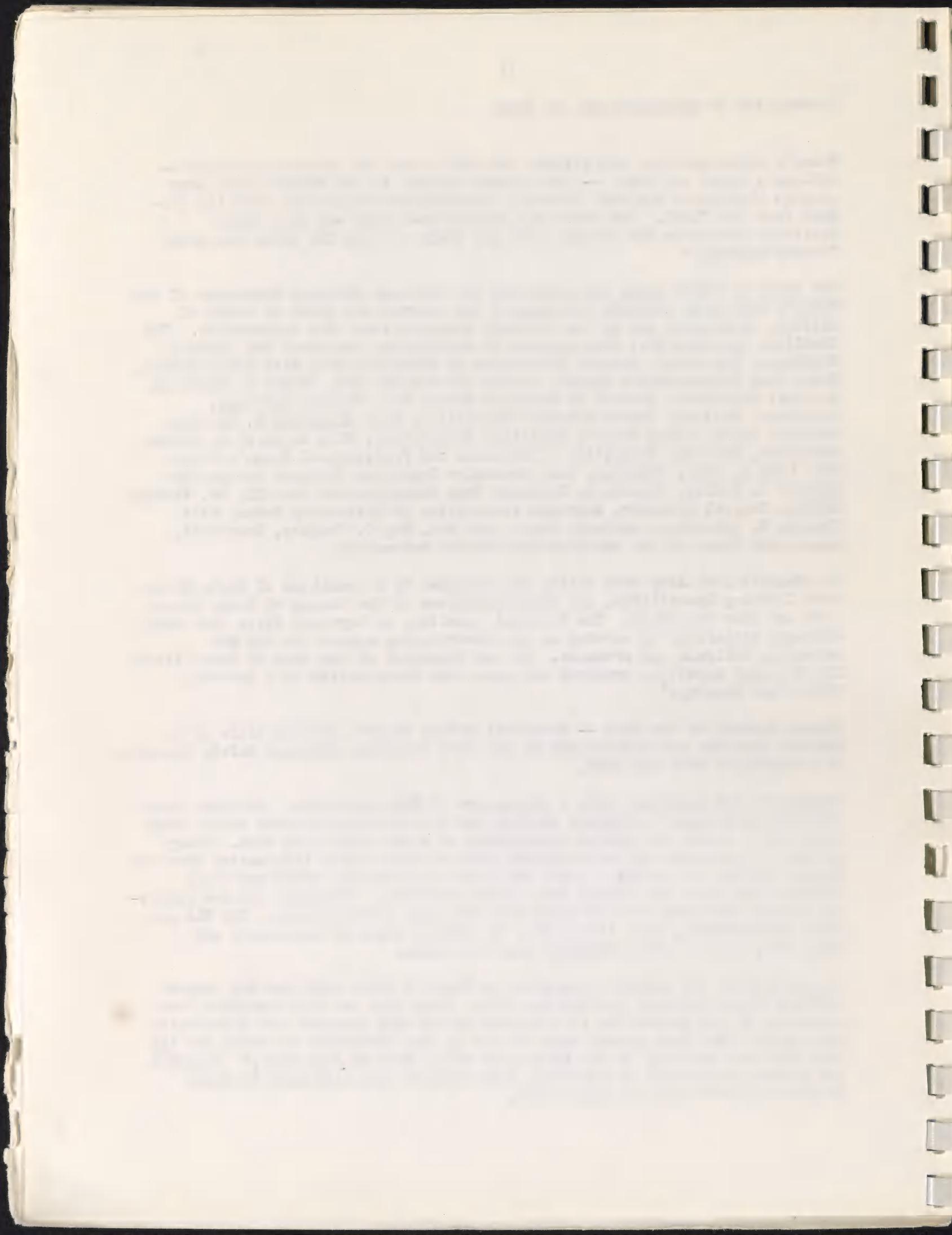
The names of those women who comprised the National Advisory Committee of the Women's Land Army indicate the support the program was given by women of national prominence and by the national organizations they represented. The Committee included Mrs. Dean Acheson of Washington, chairman; Mrs. LaFell Dickinson, President, General Federation of Women's Clubs; Miss Lella Gaddis, State Home Demonstration Leader, Purdue University; Mrs. Thomas G. Garrison, National President, Council of Catholic Women; Mrs. William Hastings, President, National Parent-Teacher Association; Miss Elizabeth B. Herring, National Board, Young Women's Christian Association; Miss Margaret A. Hickey, President, National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs; Mrs. Lida S. Ives, Chairman, Home Economics Committee National Grange; Mrs. Leonard J. Kille, President, National Home Demonstration Council; Dr. Kathryn McHale, General Director, American Association of University Women; Miss Francis W. Valentine, Ashland, Mass.; and Mrs. Roy C. Weagley, President, Associated Women of the American Farm Bureau Federation.

The Women's Land Army work outfit was designed by a committee of State Extension Clothing Specialists, and representatives of the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics. The National Committee on Boys and Girls Club Work, Chicago, cooperated by serving as the distributing agency for the WLA garments, insignia and armbands. In the promotion of the sale of these items, The National Committee prepared and gave wide distribution to a leaflet, "Help Your Country."

"Women Workers On the Farm -- Practical Safety Hints", was the title of a leaflet prepared and distributed by the Farm Division, National Safety Council, in cooperation with the USDA.

Newspapers and magazines were a strong arm of WLA recruiting. National magazines devoted pages to feature stories and illustrating pictures and in many cases front covers to colored photographs of women doing farm work. Story writers and magazine editors received much of their basic information from the Federal office of the WLA. State and local publications often got their stories from state and county farm labor personnel. Newspaper stories reporting actual farm work done by women were valuable contributions. The WLA program, incidentally, lent itself well to fashion pages of newspapers and magazines, many of which featured farm work togs.

Cooperation of the General Federation of Women's Clubs with the WLA program included Essay Contests in 1944 and 1945. Both 1944 and 1945 contests were announced by the Federation in circulars which they prepared and distributed nationally. War bond prizes were offered by the Federation to women for the best 500 word articles on "My Experience Doing Wartime Farm Work." Colorful and varied experiences as emergency farm workers were discussed in these articles by both town and farm women.



Winning essay in 1944 WLA contest sponsored  
by General Federation of Women's Clubs.

W O M E N ' S  
L A N D  
A R M Y

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
EXTENSION SERVICE, Washington 25, D. C.

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MY EXPERIENCE AS AN EMERGENCY FARM WORKER  
Mrs. Leslie Tresham, Hornick, Iowa

It was with a feeling of pride and uncertainty that I started my day as a farm helper. I had promised a farmer, whose only son had enlisted in the Marines, to haul corn from a picker to the elevator. Before daylight, I prepared the tractor for the day's work...this meant filling it with gas, water, and oil.

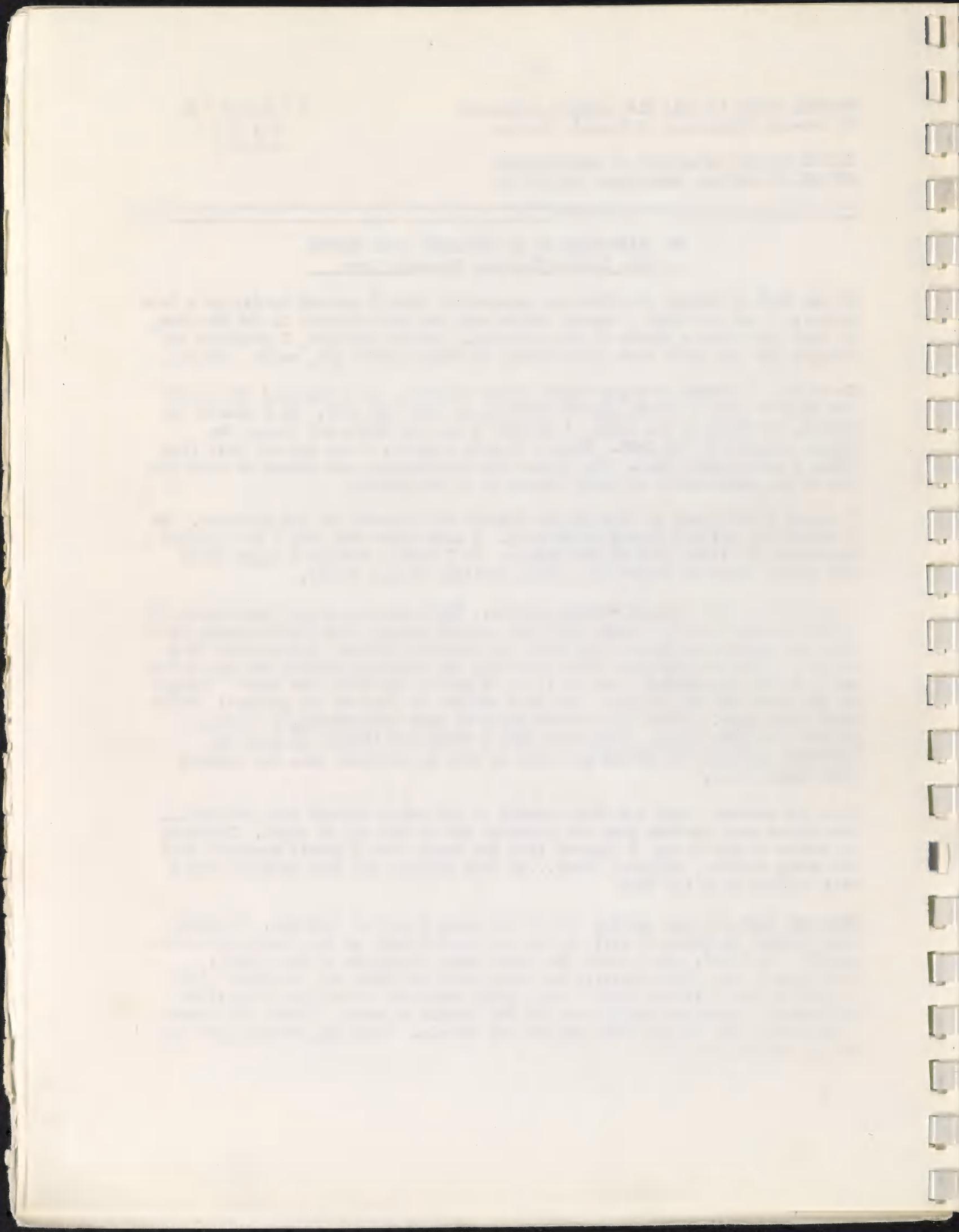
Carefully, I hooked an empty wagon to the tractor. As I released the clutch the tractor gave a lurch, almost throwing me from the seat. As I neared the picker, standing on the field, I decided I was too close and turned the wheels sharply to the left. When I finally stopped, I was several feet from where I should have been. The farmer was considerate, and helped me push the tug on the wagon until we could fasten it to the picker.

I hooked a full load of corn to the tractor and started for the elevator. As I neared the hoist I became frightened. I knew there was only 3 or 4 inches clearance on either side of the wheels. If I made a mistake I might upset the hoist, breaking chains and glass, possibly injure myself.

I managed to pull through without mishap. Next came the really hard part. I had to unhook from the wagon, turn the tractor around in a limited space, and line the pulley on the tractor, with the elevator pulley. I had never done anything like that before. After twisting and turning, backing and going forward, I finally decided I was in line. I put on the belt, but hadn't thought of the frost on the pulleys. The belt refused to stay on the pulleys! Tears came to my eyes! After what seemed hours of more maneuvering, I finally pulled it tight enough. This time when I threw the tractor in gear the elevator commenced to shriek and moan as only an elevator can, but sounded like music to me.

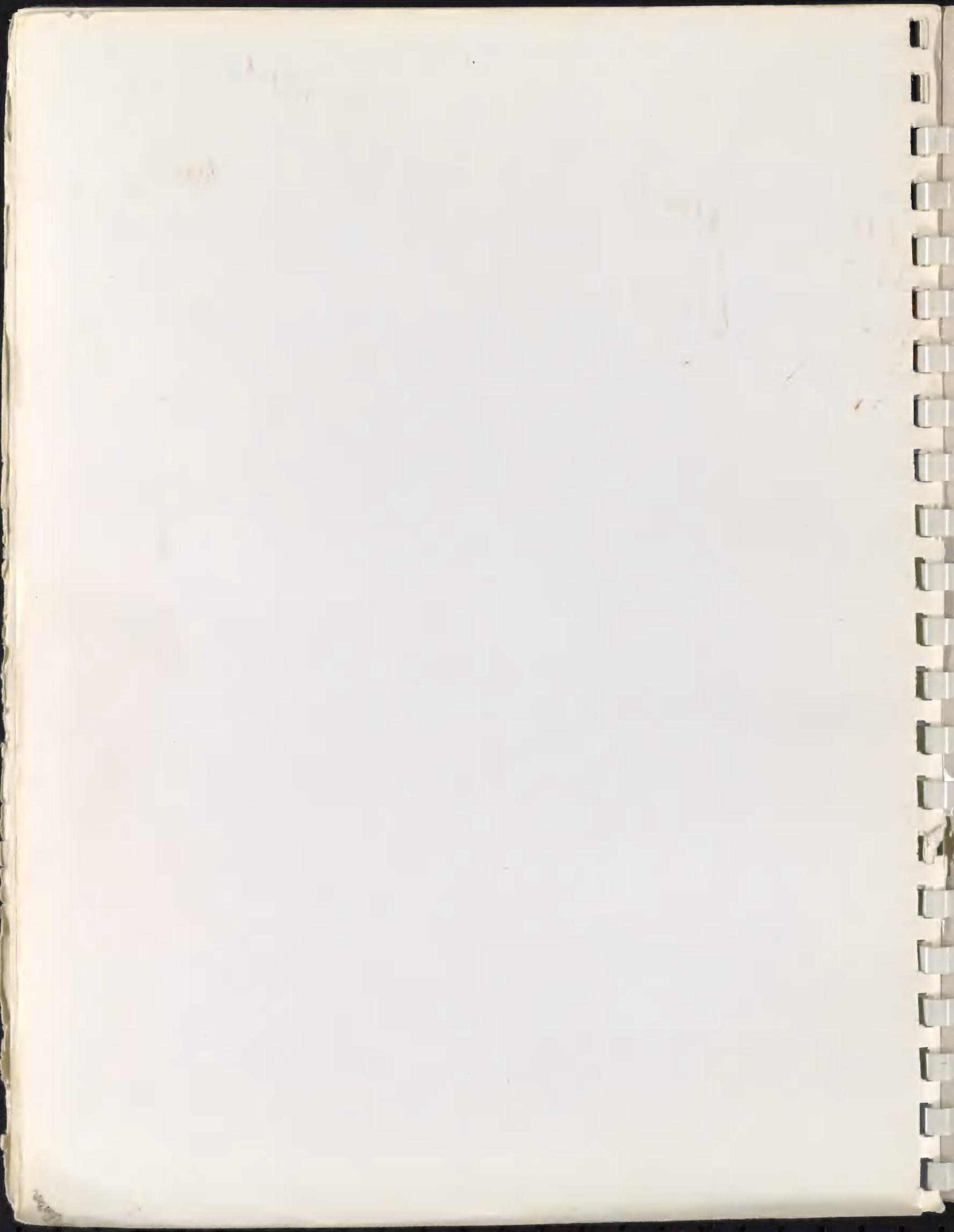
In a few seconds I had the front wheels of the wagon hoisted into the air...the yellow ears tumbled into the elevator and up and out of sight. Thinking to hasten things along, I climbed into the wagon, but I hadn't reckoned with the steep incline, slippery floor...my feet slipped out from under me and I went sliding with the corn.

When the last ear had tumbled out of the wagon I was so relieved. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry! I was soon hooked back on the wagon and starting for the field. As I swung the empty wagon alongside of the picker, this time in the right place...the farmer shouted, "Have any trouble?" "Not a bit," I lied, "It was easy." And, so it went load after load, day after day, until I have now hauled over 10,000 bushels of corn. Tired? Of course I get tired, but so does that boy in the foxhole. That boy, whose place I'm trying so hard to fill.





**MAGAZINE COVERS·1943-1944·Assembled by:  
Women's Land Army Division, Extension Farm Labor Program, USDA.**







## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Women made a definite contribution to food production. When they went to farm homes to live their activities were varied like those of all hired hands on a farm. Many of these "live-ins" drove tractors, trucks or combines, milked cows and cared for poultry flocks. Women with and without farm experience often did heavy field work, shocked grain and even pitched hay. Some of the jobs women did helped release other members of the farm family, more familiar with farm machinery and livestock and more able to do the heavy work. Sometimes they made trips to town for supplies or helped with the housework.

Women who went to the fields and orchards picked beans, tomatoes and other vegetables; they detasseled corn, picked potatoes, picked and packed berries, apples, peaches, grapes and other fruits. They worked in cotton, grain, tobacco and flax. Stories of their contributions could fill many pages.

In Ohio, for instance, 75 WLA girls, mostly from Ohio cities, picked cherries in the 100-acre Silver Fleece Orchard in Sandusky County, daily earnings ranging from \$3.50 and \$8.00. This crew with 75 Mexicans and 200 German prisoners of war picked more than 500 tons of cherries from this orchard in 22 days.

## ...Oregon Housewives Help

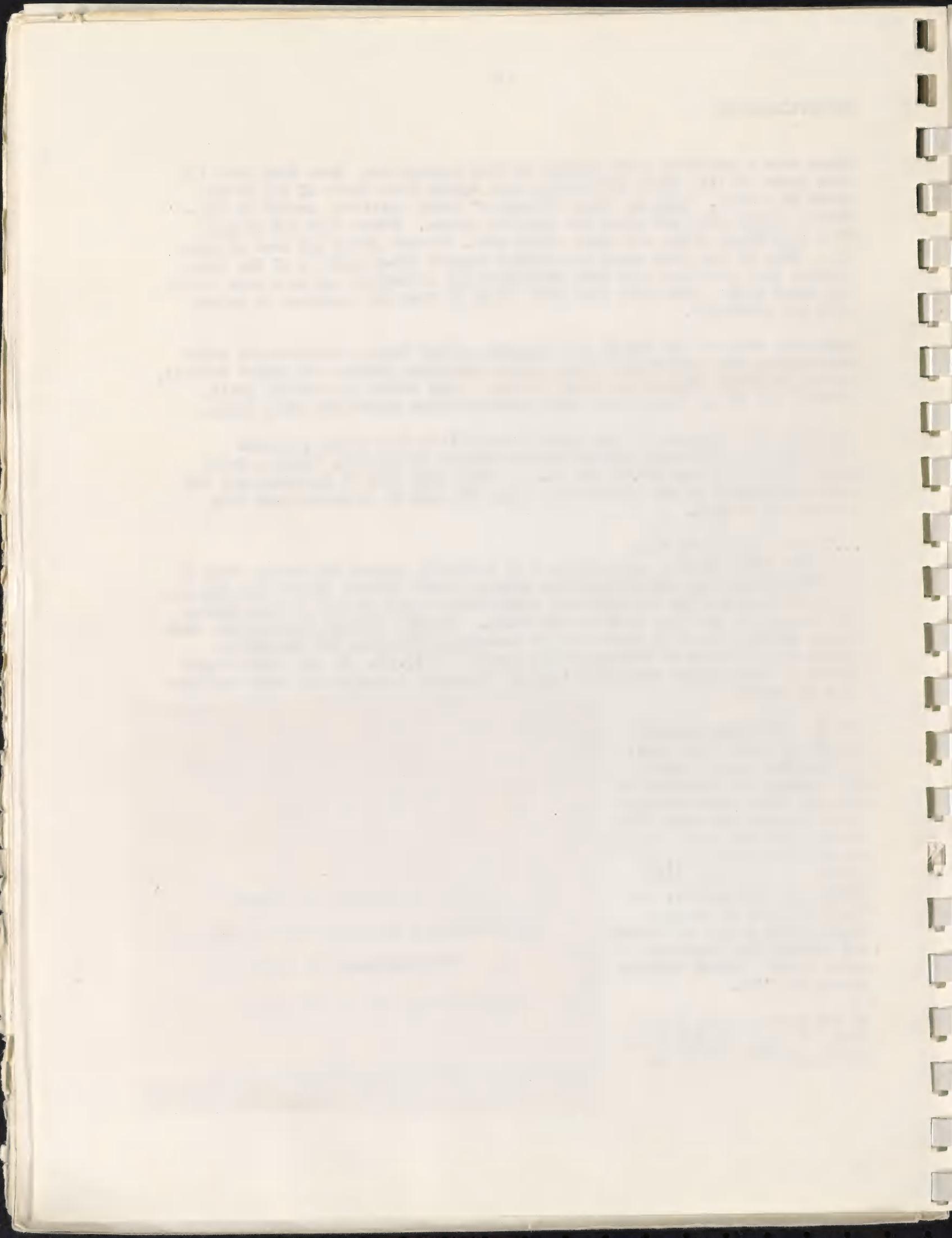
In Oregon WLA platoons of housewives in Portland, Eugene and Salem, went to the fields each day during the busy season. Each platoon leader was responsible for recruiting, training and supervising women in her platoon during the harvest of berries, peaches and beans. One WLA platoon working one week picked 28,493 pounds of beans in 139 man-days, averaging 205 pounds per person per day with an average daily earning of \$5.12. In the first eight months of 1942, there were more than 17 thousand placements of women in farm jobs in Oregon.

In 1944, Michigan placed 14,197 women in farm work. In four WLA cherry camps, 467 workers (265 maximum at any one time) were employed by 47 farmers for whom they worked 4409 man-days, during which they picked 401,563 pounds of cherries, 5146 pounds of raspberries, and 57,976 pounds of beans, topped 3494 crates of onions, and worked 1042 hours in other crops. These campers earned \$11,973.

At the Norwich camp in New York, in 1944, 55 WLA women picked 40,000 bushels of



*This live-in wife of a service man volunteered to help on a Connecticut farm.*





*Women are especially good as fruit pickers*

peas and beans. Plattsburg State Teachers College sent 260 young women to one orchard every afternoon during the last half of September, and they picked 19,679 bushels of apples in 5,286 hours work.

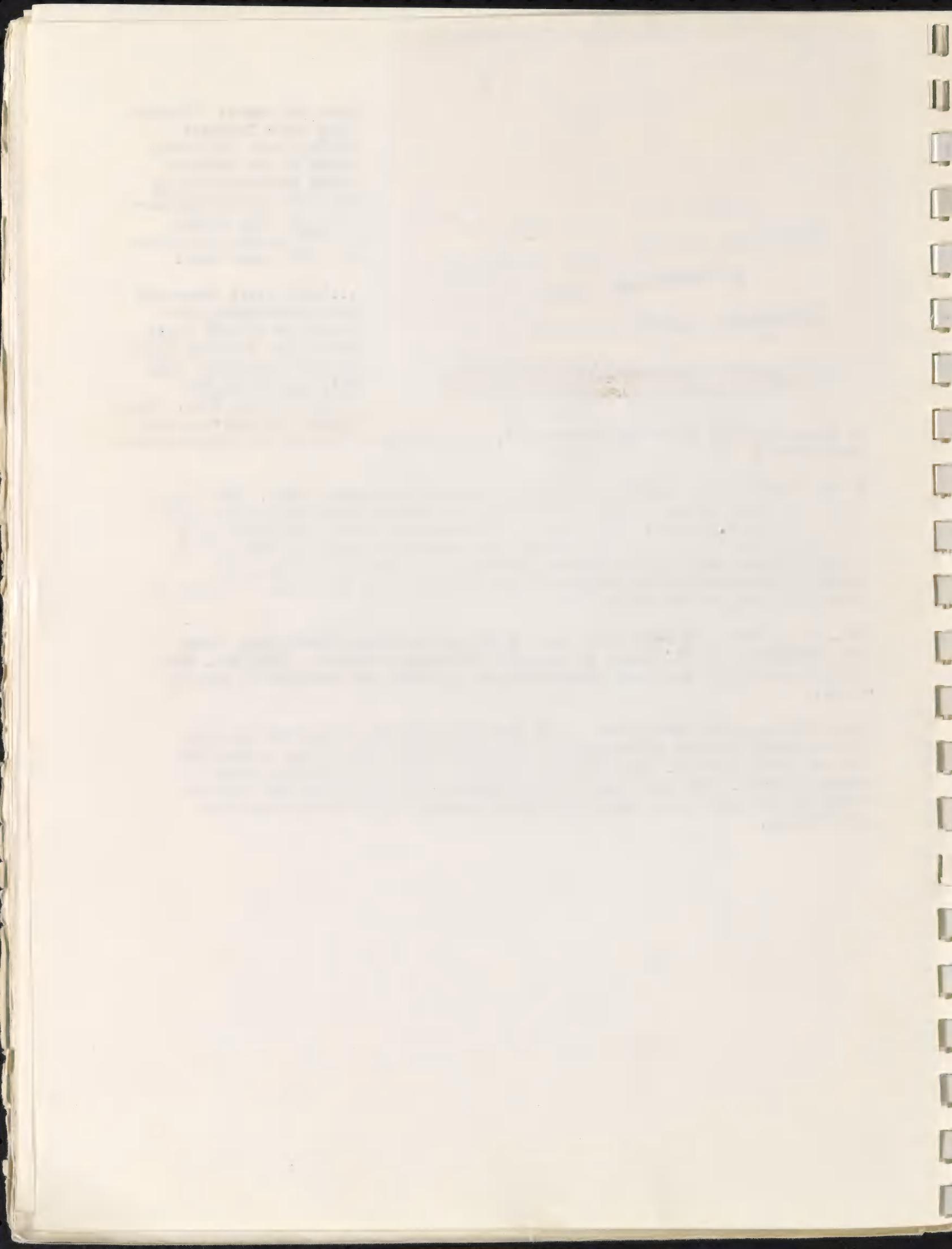
...Smith Girls Cooperate Among outstanding programs for college girls, was a plan in which Smith College cooperated with WLA, recruiting 173 young women in 1944. They worked the entire summer

in Massachusetts, Maine and Connecticut, giving farmers "steady and conscientious assistance."

Most of the accomplishments quoted above were done by urban women. What farm women and many workers placed individually on farms achieved is a story which varies with every woman. Almost every farm woman had additional work to do because of war conditions. One Midwestern farm woman drove the tractor from 4 until 8 a.m. each day during corn planting time and then did the farm chores before starting her regular housework, which she did without benefit of electricity or running water.

Mrs. Alice Davis, 71 years old, was one of the Kentucky workers (men, women and youth) who went to Maine to help with the potato harvest. When Mrs. Davis picked potatoes in Aroostook County, Maine, in 1943, she averaged 55 barrels a day.

Much publicity has been given to the fact that wartime food production was maintained at a level approximately 32 percent above the average production for the years 1935-39. Many factors enabled farmers to accomplish this amazing record. But certainly the willingness with which farm and nonfarm women went to work in an emergency played a part in this food production achievement.



## EVALUATION

The Women's Land Army program not only recruited, trained, placed and supervised women farm workers but served to emphasize the contribution all women on farms were making and could continue to make in producing food during the war. Even where women were not placed through regular Extension channels some were undoubtedly influenced in their choice of vacations and summertime activities by the nation-wide spotlight thrown on farm work for women.

In Kansas, for instance, during the summer of 1945, some 10,000 town women -- most of them on farms of friends and relatives -- helped with the cooking, housework and care of children, as well as with the gardens, chickens, and trucking wheat to country elevators. Kansas town women have of course made similar contributions in previous years but their numbers increased during the war.

Certainly the chief value of the WLA program to the nation was the assistance given farmers in a time of labor shortage. Their work was mostly of an emergency nature but farmers found that what they lacked in physical stamina and inexperience was often made up for in conscientiousness and efficiency. One large poultryman in Massachusetts declared "I'll continue to hire women after the war. In an incubator room they find dirt where a man never would."

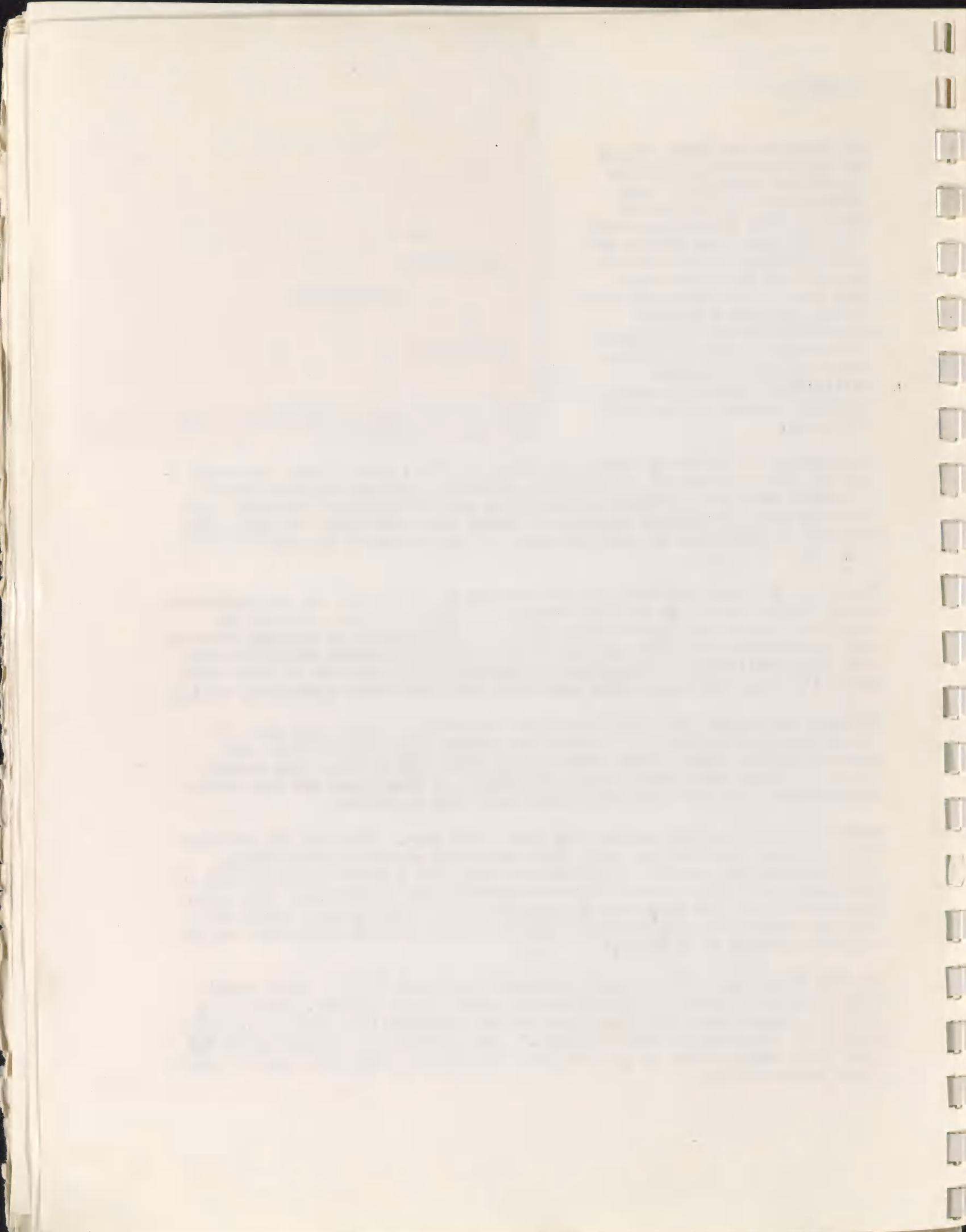
Farmers appreciated this willingness of town women to help them out. If women were not a major labor source for farmers those who did farm work demonstrated to farmers that urban people would help if they were needed. There is little doubt that if greater numbers of town women had been critically needed for farm labor they could have been recruited.

Women themselves gained values from their farm work. They had the satisfaction of doing essential war work while receiving prevailing farm wages, improved physical condition from outdoor work, and a deeper understanding of other ways of living. The experience certainly was educational. One girl, impressed by her new knowledge of the amount of work necessary to get milk from the cow to the city doorstep, said "A bottle of milk will never be just a bottle of milk to me again."

To many women the chance to work outdoors was a real thrill. This remark from a town girl after her summer's work on a farm is typical. "The thing I like to remember most and liked the best was the beautiful ride in the early morning to the farm and back at night." One agricultural leader called WLA town girls "ambassadors of good will" -- helping to bring about better rural-urban understanding.



*A better rural-urban understanding was an important by-product of the WLA program.*



## IMPLICATIONS TO HOME DEMONSTRATION WORKERS

Among other contributions of the Women's Land Army program, the enriched experiences given home demonstration workers who devoted time to WLA work have been of great value.

Some of the experiences these women had in their full-time or part-time work have been recruiting and placing town women, contacting women's organizations, college placement officers, editors, writers, employers and personnel managers in business and industry. They helped establish camps for women farm workers in about one-third of the states, arranging for the management and supervision of these camps.

Although their prewar activities had given these home demonstration workers many contacts with farm women their WLA duties got them even better acquainted with farm problems. They gained new insight into farm employment from both the farmer's and the hired worker's points of view.

In the light of their wartime experiences these women are more concerned with the problems of homemakers in homes of hired farm workers and the needs of tenant families and seasonal and migrant farm workers. They are searching for ways to help the woman who is doing the double job of field work and home-making and who does not meet with an organized group. Are home demonstration programs, they ask, being planned to meet the needs of these homemakers?

What are some of the other benefits derived from their wartime experiences? Certainly home demonstration workers learned anew the value of radio and news stories to promote a program. They may make greater use of these two media in the future. In addition, publicity given farm women's activities during the war will accrue in continued interest on the part of the public in the problems of farm homemakers.

Considerable impetus was given to work simplification during the war and it is expected that this will continue to hold the interest of farm women who have a long work day even in peacetime. The tours and caravans sponsored by Extension in several states have been a means of reaching more people on the subject of work simplification in the home — farm men as well as women.

It is to be expected that Extension workers will capitalize on the better understanding between rural and urban folks which flourished during the war, and develop new ways and means to take advantage of their wartime growth of appreciation and understanding.

New attention too has been directed to housing and sanitation facilities for farm tenants and hired labor as well as for farm people in general. Nutrition simplification has been encouraged during the war and might well be the basis for more teaching in the postwar period. One dish meals and "oven meals" during busy seasons might be stressed with housewives even more than is done at present. In many farm family diets, there is a prevalence of starch and lack of fruits and vegetables. Town women coming to rural areas pointed out these lacks -- both to farm people and to farm labor personnel.



The WLA program also served to point up the need for more attractive, efficient and comfortable clothes for house and field work. The fashion of the right clothes for the job is certainly gaining greater acceptance.

All in all, home demonstration workers concerned with the WLA program gained a wider view. The farm labor program has given them a better understanding of agriculture and its problems, a better understanding of the problems of farm women who do outdoor farm work in addition to home-making, a new knowledge of conditions of hired, tenant, migrant and foreign workers, and a conviction that their wartime experience can benefit home demonstration work as they resume their peacetime responsibilities.



## PLACEMENTS OF WOMEN IN FARM JOBS

State	*1944	1945 (10 months)
Alabama	12,572	4,897
Arizona	502	143
Arkansas	78,915	54,051
California	75,771	59,002
Colorado	5,253	4,344
Connecticut	882	151
Delaware	1,296	373
Florida	15,135	6,434
Georgia	45,075	31,494
Idaho	4,143	4,333
Illinois	6,360	3,654
Indiana	2,569	1,289
Iowa	1,996	1,945
Kansas	2,088	705
Kentucky	3,088	2,555
Louisiana	21,448	16,940
Maine	1,617	962
Maryland	16,409	4,394
Massachusetts	1,871	406
Michigan	32,302	13,585
Minnesota	5,958	3,255
Mississippi	60,722	22,143
Missouri	5,056	221
Montana	415	742
Nebraska	956	920
Nevada	140	270
New Hampshire	678	737
New Jersey	8,144	945
New Mexico	2,187	918
New York	22,356	14,299
North Carolina	27,964	43,749
North Dakota	5,482	14,162
Ohio	4,268	1,633
Oklahoma	43,703	12,643
Oregon	25,072	26,337
Pennsylvania	6,072	2,247
Rhode Island	35	19
South Carolina	21,070	12,686
South Dakota	1,627	1,877
Tennessee	22,144	20,772
Texas	127,342	78,949
Utah	2,852	1,675
Vermont	533	72
Virginia	16,441	7,545
Washington	29,759	23,879
West Virginia	240	91
Wisconsin	3,205	1,033
Wyoming	402	127
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>774,115</b>	<b>505,603</b>

\*Adjusted to State annual statistical reports

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TOP, A	STO, L	AMAZON
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500, PA	120, L	environment
JAC	125, 2	obstacles
121	COR	Opportunities
CRC	305, 1	problems
MEA, S	225, 11	resources
APL, IC	370, 2A	rights
PEC, A	611, A	society
122, S	905, 2	should
PSC, L	300, P	social
CAP, U	550, S	values
307	210, P	whilst
302, S	120, L	will
010, LI	120, I	would
229	904, 1E	working
128, A	170, I	workforce
304	170, 1	workers
232, 2S	500, SE	Aluminium
210, F	320, 2	industries
215, 2S	230, 00	Indonesia
120	380, 2	Indonesian
CAP	21A	industry
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PEC, AL	300, 2S	would
CAP, EA	120, 1P	working
210, AI	500, S	workforce
200, I	170, 2	workforce
CAP, CI	207, EA	workforce
200, DS	370, RS	workforce
TAS, S	210, 2	workforce
RI	25	workforce
080, SI	070, IC	should
120, I	120, S	efficiencies
210, DS	110, 2S	levels
040, ST	210, 1C	economies
220, F	210, 2S	time
210, 1F	210	data
210, F	120, 1I	data
070, ES	220, 2S	industry
ES	010	industry
300, L	200, 2	minerals
121	201	policy
EOS, EGS	210, 1P	policy

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